



Enhancing Agricultural Productivity Through Women's Empowerment

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Agriculture is one of the most important sectors supporting livelihoods and food security across the world. Women play a crucial role in agricultural production, rural development, and household food security. Globally, women constitute a significant share of the agricultural workforce and contribute substantially to farming activities, livestock management, and post-harvest processing. Despite their extensive involvement, their contributions often remain undervalued or unrecognized in agricultural policies and statistics. In many developing countries, women serve as cultivators, agricultural labourers, and managers of household food systems. Their participation is therefore essential for achieving sustainable agricultural development and rural prosperity.

Women are responsible for producing a large portion of the world's food and play a key role in maintaining agricultural biodiversity, conserving natural resources, and ensuring family nutrition. However, social and economic constraints such as limited land ownership, restricted access to credit, technology, and education often reduce their productivity and decision-making power. Recognizing and empowering women in agriculture is thus vital for improving agricultural productivity and ensuring food security.

Participation of Women in Agricultural Activities

Women participate in almost every stage of agricultural production. Their roles range from pre-sowing activities to post-harvest operations. In many rural communities, women are actively involved in tasks such as seed selection, sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, harvesting, threshing, and storage of agricultural produce. In addition to crop production, women also contribute significantly to allied sectors such as animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries, and dairy farming.

Studies indicate that women perform nearly 70% of farm-related activities in India and around 80% of rural women depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Their participation is particularly high in horticulture, livestock management, and post-harvest processing. Women also contribute extensively to maintaining household food supplies by cultivating kitchen gardens and managing small livestock. These activities not only support household nutrition but also generate additional income for rural families.

Women also play an important role in the conservation of agricultural biodiversity. Traditionally, they have been responsible for preserving indigenous seeds, selecting crop varieties suited to local conditions, and maintaining soil fertility through organic practices. Their knowledge of traditional farming techniques and local ecosystems helps sustain agricultural systems and maintain ecological balance.

Women and Food Security

Women farmers are central to ensuring household and community food security. In many developing countries, they are responsible for growing staple crops, vegetables, and fruits that provide essential nutrients for families. Women also manage food preparation and distribution within households, ensuring that family members receive adequate nutrition. Because women tend to allocate a large portion of their income to family welfare, their economic empowerment has a direct impact on improving nutrition, education, and health outcomes in rural communities.

Research shows that when women farmers receive equal access to productive resources such as land, credit, fertilizers, and technology, agricultural productivity can increase significantly. Estimates suggest that closing the gender gap in agriculture could raise farm yields by up to 30% and increase overall agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4%. Such improvements would contribute greatly to reducing hunger and poverty worldwide.

Feminization of Agriculture

In recent decades, agriculture has experienced a phenomenon known as the “feminization of agriculture.” This trend occurs when women increasingly take on agricultural responsibilities due to male migration to urban areas or non-farm jobs. As men leave rural areas for better employment opportunities, women remain in villages and manage farms, livestock, and household resources. Consequently, women have become the backbone of agricultural production in many developing regions.

This shift has expanded the responsibilities of women in agriculture. In addition to traditional labour roles, many women now act as farm managers, entrepreneurs, and leaders of agricultural cooperatives. Self-help groups and women-led farmer organizations have also emerged as important platforms that enable women to access credit, markets, and agricultural training. These groups strengthen women’s participation in agricultural decision-making and help improve rural livelihoods.

Challenges Faced by Women in Agriculture

Despite their significant contribution, women farmers face numerous challenges that limit their productivity and socio-economic advancement. One of the major constraints is limited access to land ownership. In many societies, cultural and legal barriers prevent women from owning or inheriting agricultural land. As a result, they often work as unpaid family labourers or wage labourers without formal recognition as farmers.

Women also have limited access to agricultural inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation facilities, and modern machinery. Agricultural extension services and training programmes are often directed toward male farmers, leaving women with fewer opportunities to adopt improved technologies. Furthermore, women frequently face difficulties in obtaining credit and financial support due to lack of collateral or formal land ownership.

Another challenge is the heavy workload faced by rural women. In addition to agricultural labour, they are responsible for household duties such as cooking, childcare, water collection, and fuel gathering. This dual burden reduces the time available for education, skill development, and participation in community decision-making processes.

Empowerment and Policy Support

Recognizing the importance of women in agriculture, governments and international organizations have initiated several programmes aimed at empowering women farmers. These initiatives focus on providing training, improving access to credit, promoting women’s self-help groups, and encouraging participation in farmer producer organizations. Capacity-building programmes also help women adopt improved farming practices, climate-resilient technologies, and value-addition activities such as food processing and agribusiness. Education and skill development are also key factors in empowering women in

agriculture. Increasing female participation in agricultural education and research has contributed to greater innovation and knowledge dissemination within the sector. Women agricultural scientists, extension workers, and entrepreneurs play a vital role in transferring new technologies to farmers and improving agricultural productivity. Promoting gender equality in agriculture can significantly improve food security, rural livelihoods, and economic development. Policies that ensure equal access to land rights, credit facilities, training programmes, and market opportunities will enable women farmers to contribute more effectively to agricultural growth and sustainable development.

Conclusion

Women play an indispensable role in agriculture and rural development. Their contributions span across crop production, livestock management, food processing, and household nutrition. Despite their significant involvement, women farmers often face challenges such as limited land ownership, restricted access to resources, and social inequalities. Addressing these barriers through gender-sensitive policies and empowerment initiatives is essential for achieving sustainable agricultural development. Strengthening the role of women in agriculture will not only enhance farm productivity but also improve food security, reduce poverty, and promote inclusive economic growth in rural communities.

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